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ABSTRACT

This paper begins with a history of the tumultuous beginning of Arkansas's two-year college system. The system has gone through three major eras with the third, and current, era beginning in 1991. As a result of commissions sponsored by local businesses and the Carnegie Foundation in 1991, legislation was passed to convert 13 of the 24 vocational schools to technical colleges under the supervision of the Higher Education Board. The three types of two-year colleges are described: comprehensive community colleges, comprehensive technical colleges, and university branch campuses. The paper also describes the governance of the two-year college system by the State Board of Higher Education. Different funding mechanisms, which are based on laws regulating collection of local sales taxes and millage, for each type of two-year institution are discussed, as are how state funds can be used. An overview is provided of student enrollment in terms of age and gender but not ethnicity; the faculty, almost entirely native to Arkansas, are required to teach a minimum of 15 credit hours per term. The paper concludes with a look at articulation, stating that articulation between the two-year college and university system is similar to that in Florida. (VWC)

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The Two-Year College System of the Great State of Arkansas

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History

The two-year college system had a very tumultuous beginning. The system has gone through three major eras. The first era lasted from the late 1800's to the 1960's and included the birth, death, re-birth, extinction, and resurrection of various two-year colleges. The second era began in 1965 with legislation allowing local communities to create community/junior colleges and ended around 1989. The third, and current, era began in 1991 which gives the system backbone and consistency.

The first true junior college was said to be Crescent College established in 1908. It was a "high-class" women's school (Cole). In the early 1900's, the state created four regional agricultural high schools which later became two-year colleges. These two-year colleges are now regional universities. About the same time, five cities created municipal junior colleges. Of the five two-year colleges, two exist today. These are Westark C.C. and U. of Arkansas at Little Rock. Also in this time period, Arkansas State University - Beebe (ASUB) was founded as a public school of agriculture which gained junior college status gained in 1932. ASUB is the state's oldest continuously public two-year college. Some colleges, such as Westark (formerly Fort Smith Jr. Coll.) were publicly supported with state funds as part of school systems. This financial assistance ended in 1950 when the state supreme court ruled against public funding for higher

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education. Westark went private, only to return in 1965. Of the 23 two-year colleges prior to 1965, 11 have closed permanently, 2 are public two-year colleges, 5 are public universities, 2 are religious junior colleges, and 3 are private four-year colleges.

In an attempt to get out of the junior college dark ages, Arkansas's Department of Education created a system of state-supported post-secondary vo-tech schools in 1957. These 26 schools did not offer two-year degrees. Today, 11 remain vo-tech schools and 15 are in the two-year system. In 1964, the Commission on Coordination of Higher Education Finance produced a study that suggested the need for a two-year system. This study lead to Amendment 52 to the state constitution which gave the General Assembly the ability to establish junior college districts and provide funding to sustain them. The amendment prohibited the conversion of community colleges to four-year institutions.

In 1965, Act 560 required any institution wishing to be a public two-year college to offer comprehensive education programs, have locally elected Boards of Trustees, and provide voter-approved property taxes to cover two-thirds of operating costs. This was to give communities more control over the community colleges. The voters of two counties, Phillips and Sebastian, created community colleges under this act during that year. Westark became a public Community College again. Since the costs to many communities was extremely high, many most counties chose not to even investigate community colleges. The next community colleges did not appear until 1973, when Act 560 was amended.

The revised Act 560 limited the number of community colleges to eight, prohibited dormitories on two-year college campuses, and banned certain sports from college campuses. The beneficial part of the revision came from suggestions of Shelby Breedlove, President of Westark. Breedlove recommended that the state fund general operation of each college with the local districts covering the capital costs. The funding restructuring sparked the creation of four new community colleges in 2 years. The last of the eight community colleges, allowed by Act 560, was to be a "college without walls" utilizing leased buildings and public school facilities. It took NorthWest Arkansas C.C. from 1989 to 1995 to decide that a permanent structure was better for the students and staff and settled in one location.

In 1991, as a result of commissions sponsored by local businesses and the Carnegie Foundation, legislation was passed to convert 13 of the 24 vo-tech schools to technical colleges under the supervision of the Higher Education Board. Each technical college was to become comprehensive and receive college level accreditation by 1997. These technical colleges, through a series of mergers, became 9 in total. The conversion of the vo-tech schools to comprehensive colleges represents to beginning of the current state-wide two-year college system.

Types of Two-Year Colleges

The two-year college system of Arkansas is composed of 23 institutions of three types. There are comprehensive community colleges, comprehensive technical colleges, and university branch campuses. Each of the three offer the same types of programs for the A.A. and A.S. degree

seeking students. There are 10 community colleges, 9 technical colleges, and 4 university branches. Each has a different funding system and governing board structure.

Governance

The two-year college system of Arkansas is governed by the State Board of Higher Education that coordinates the 23 two-year colleges and the 10 universities.

The governing boards for the two-year colleges differ in consistency, role, and authority when comparing the three types of schools. Until 1995, the community colleges had nine (9) member boards of trustees that were elected by county districts to 6 year staggered terms. After 1995, the State Assembly passed a law allowing the community colleges to have the option of letting the governor appoint the boards (3 members every 2 years). Five community colleges chose this new plan.

The technical colleges are allowed to have seven (7) member boards appointed, by the governor, to 7 year terms (1 member each year). The university branch campuses are governed by the university's governing board. A Chancellor is the CEO of the branch and reports to the University President.

With the shifting of some community colleges from elected boards to appointed boards, legislation has been threatened to shift to single member districts where minorities are more that 10% of the population. There have also been a lawsuit against Phillips C.C. over the election of district trustees.

Funding

The funding mechanism is different for each type of two-year institution. The differences are based on laws regulating collection of local sales taxes and millage, and how state funds can be used. All public schools get state funds for operating costs.

Until 1995, the community colleges could not use state monies for capital projects. These schools had to rely on millage that ranged from 0.5 to 4.5 mils. In 1995, legislation was passed to allow community colleges access to state bond money for renovations and other building projects. The community colleges have local taxing districts in place. At the present time, approximately 40% of funds come from local sources, including tuition. The remaining funds are allocated from tne state budget.

The technical colleges have no taxing districts in place, but are legally able to create and levy taxes. There are 4 technical colleges that have local sales tax money allocated for building purposes. Approximately 70% of the funds come from the state. The remaining portion is from local sources, including tuition. The university branches are funded through the university system budget.

In 1995, the state board approved a measure to basis funding for all institutions on productivity rather than enrollment. The state ranks around 30th among states when looking at comparing government appropriated funds per FTE, tuition costs per FTE, and the two revenue sources combined per FTE. According to State Profiles: Financing Higher Education, 1978 to 1994, the average total funding per FTE was $6361 with Arkansas at $6089.

Student enrollment

The enrollment at the two-year schools varies greatly. The technical colleges' enrollment range from 350 at Ozarka to 1400 at North Arkansas. The community colleges' enrollment range from 150 at Shorter to 5500 at Westark. The university branches average 1800 students each. The apparently small enrollment figures have several causes. Many schools are geographically close together for political reasons. The two-year colleges account for approximately 30% of the 90,000 students in Arkansas public higher education system. This percent is in part due to Arkansas's virtual lack of a two-year system until 1991. Even with the low numbers, over 95% of the population is within 40 miles of a two-college.

The growth of the two-year college system has two levels. The first is the steady 2% growth found in the community colleges and the universities (and branches). The second is the 100% to 200% growth of many technical colleges that converted from vocational-technical schools in 1991. Many of these schools jumped from 100 students in 1991 to 400 student in 1995.

The average of the students is in the upper 20's (26-30) with part-time students out numbering full-time students. There are more females than males in the two-year colleges. The faculty to student ratio is approximately 1:20. The cost of a year's tuition at the two-year schools vary from $600 to $5500 with most around $700.

There was little data collected on ethnicity of the students. According to the Deputy Director of Technical Education, most schools are reported to have an ethnic composition resembling the county in which the schools are located. The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, stated in its

Summer 1994 edition that Arkansas ranked 17th among states when comparing percent of African-Americans receiving baccalaureate degrees to those enrolled (5.6%).

Faculty

The faculty is 60% female, 95% European American, and almost entirely native to Arkansas. The faculty members are required to teach a minimum of 15 credit hours per term. This minimum is set by the individual colleges, but has become a state-wide norm. Most schools do not utilize the professor system of title and/or rank. The universities and their branches have tenure and rank. Of the community colleges, only Westark has tenure. With this exception, all community college and technical college faculty are referred to as "instructor" and are given annual contracts.

Articulation and other stuff

Articulation between the two-year colleges and the university system is similar to that in Florida. Since 1993, two-year college graduates with A.A. degrees are guaranteed transfer and admittance into universities as long as the student and the university have the same 47 credit hour general education core. All two-year colleges offer the 47 hour program and thus have transferable degree programs.

The Arkansas technical colleges have begun unique programs to focus on environmental protection and hazardous materials clean up.

The State Assembly, in an attempt to reduce the cost of remediation, has implemented assessment measures that begin in grade school and continue through the end of the freshman year of college to determine the quality of education provided (Arkansas Home Page).

North Arkansas Community/Technical College is possibly the only two-year colleges to be visited by two U.S. Presidents before they ran for the office: Bush in 1985 and Clinton in 1984.

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